

The Case of the Missing Car by evergreenwind

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Summary:

Nancy is the school's go-to private investigator thanks to the skills that she's picked up working as a receptionist at the sheriff department on weekends. Steve enlists her help to find his father's missing car.

1. The Client

Nancy accepted the twenty dollars Steve Harrington had given her. "There's more where that came from, now will you help me or not?" he pleaded. Nancy looked over to Barbara Holland who was sitting next to her. "What do you think, Barb?" Nancy asked her friend.

Barb folded her arms and looked across the cafeteria table at Steve. "What exactly is it that you want us to do for you?"

Steve explained to the pair that after a party he had thrown last night at his house, his father's convertible had gone missing. His parents were due back from a trip on Sunday, meaning the car needed to be found within two days. "My dad is going to kill me if this car isn't found."

"Why not go to the cops? This is something pretty serious," Barb said. Steve gave her a pointed look. "Cops finding out that a bunch of minors were having a grand old time with booze? Yea, that's definitely going to end well for me."

Nancy briefly thought of the chief marching Steve into the station to give him a good scare about underage drinking while simultaneously sneaking a couple of drinks on the job himself. She had become the station receptionist on weekends but this simply just meant to answer non-emergency phone calls and to greet anyone that willingly came into the station. It was a pretty boring job and in a town like Hawkins, not much happened. To pass the time Nancy would eavesdrop on any talk of recent cases or read whatever previous case files were stored in the station. Nancy pulled out a small purple notebook and a pencil and proceeded with questioning Steve.

"What time did the party start and when did you notice the car was missing?"

"People started to arrive around, I dunno, 9:30 or 10 and I noticed the car was gone at 1 in the morning."

"Who was invited?"

"Anyone who mattered," he snorted. His smile disappeared when he realized he was staring back at two unamused faces. "Oh I thought I told you two about the party," he trailed off.

"You definitely invited one of us," Barb quipped. She took out a can of soda from her lunch bag and opened it.

"Can you be more specific on who was at your party?" Nancy continued as Steve's face went red.

Steve recited the names of the people he remembered seeing, "Tommy and Carol were definitely there, I remember seeing Billy I think -." Nancy interrupted and asked "Was there anyone there that you didn't invite?"

Steve looked down at the table, his eyebrows furrowed together. He then looked up and snapped his fingers. "That creep Jonathan Byers, shit, he probably stole it! Where is he?" Steve found the other boy sitting in a corner table of the cafeteria by himself.

"Wait, but, you don't know for sure that he took your car!" Nancy said as she grabbed Steve's arm to prevent him from running towards Jonathan on the spot.

"Of course it was, who else -"

"Steve Harrington," Nancy said sternly, "you hired me and Barb to find your car. We'll do that but we're gonna need your cooperation and your promise to not interfere our investigation. Do you understand?"

Steve looked at Nancy's wide eyes. He nodded but only after giving a dirty look in the direction of an unaware Jonathan. He then got up from the table and walked away. Barb took another sip of her soda. "Well I guess it's a good thing Mr. Popular is into you. It'll help us deal with his inability to control his emotions."

"Barb, we're not a thing. At least not anymore," Nancy said, glancing at her friend. Steve Harrington had dated Nancy Wheeler for about two months during the summer and then they broke it off. Everyone had assumed that Nancy was the one that was dumped but the truth

was that she was the one that ended things between them. She kept that to herself however, and let the school think that Steve Harrington had deflowered yet another virgin. Despite her silence, Barb seemed to have figured out who broke up with whom.

Barb shrugged her shoulders and took another sip of her soda. She decided not to continue pressing Nancy about her brief fling with their newest client. "So you don't think Jonathan took the car, do you?" she finally asked.

Nancy shook her head as she reviewed the notes she had taken after questioning Steve and started to write down a list titled "People to Question." At the top of the list was Jonathan Byers.

"How do you know?"

"Elementary, my dear Watson," Nancy said looking up from her notebook and smiling at Barb. "When have you ever seen Jonathan Byers socializing with *anyone* willingly?"

2. Suspect Number One

Summary for the Chapter:

Nancy starts her investigation by asking her only lead a couple of questions.

Nancy walked outside after school was over and looked around to see if she could find Jonathan. He was already by his car, placing his backpack on the backseat. She rushed down the stairs and lightly jogged towards him.

"Jonathan!"

The boy didn't turn around and shut the back car door. He then started to walk around the car towards the driver's seat.

"Jonathan!" she said again, and he turned around, slightly surprised that someone was addressing him.

"Nancy? Is, is everything okay?" His face was confused and she could see his mind racing. "Do you need me to watch Mike?"

"No, I just, I had a couple of questions, I'm trying to find something for someone," she said. She saw him quickly glance at his watch. "It won't take long, I promise."

"No, I, I just picked up a shift at work and um I just didn't want to be late, that's all," he said softly as he opened the car door. "I'm sorry," and it looked like he meant it too.

Nancy smiled, "Oh, that's okay. Will's probably coming by my place. How about I talk to you then, when you pick him up?"

Jonathan, who at this point had already started the car, looked up at Nancy, smiled and nodded and backed the car out of the parking space.

Nancy had always been aware of Jonathan but it wasn't until their little brothers had become friends that they had started talking to each other. And by talking, she meant "hello" and "hey". Sometimes

their conversation would involve an inquiry on how the other was doing or how their parents were, but they never lasted long and always ended with Will being dragged away from her house. At school they would smile at each other briefly while passing each other by, but they rarely talked. In fact, Jonathan did not talk to anyone at all. He was labeled as a loner and it was a label he did not seem to want to shed. In the cafeteria he would sit alone, either working on assignments that were due in a couple of hours, or assignments that had just been handed out that day. If he wasn't in class or at lunch, people usually would find him in the school's dark room, developing pictures he'd taken on his old camera. No matter what Steve said, Nancy just couldn't place Jonathan anywhere near that party.

Nancy was working on her biology homework when she heard the doorbell ring. She let her mother open the door and walked down once she heard Jonathan call down the basement for his brother. She waited at the base of the stairs for him to turn around to her direction. She observed that he looked much more tired than usual. She caught his eye and she gestured to follow her out to the front porch.

"So," Jonathan said when they had settled on top of the porch steps, "what exactly did you want to talk to me about?"

Nancy crossed her ankles and clasped her hands. "Well," she started. "You know about how people have started asking for my help with finding things lately?"

"And helping people in relationships figure out if they're partners are cheating on them," Jonathan said with a laugh and nodded "yea, I've heard something about that."

Nancy hadn't seen Jonathan laugh before, at least not in recent memory. She didn't realize how close she had sat next to him and realized she could hear him softly breathing as well as her own heart pounding. She actually had no idea how to start this conversation. Her gut instincts could be wrong and Jonathan could actually be the person who stole Steve's car. What would he do when she asked? Would he get angry? Would he try to make a run for it? Should she

personally chase after him if that happened or should she call Chief Hopper? If she ran after him, how would she take him down?

"Nancy?"

Nancy snapped back to reality and looked to her right. Jonathan's look of concern brought a small smile to her face.

"Sorry, I just don't really know how to ask this," she said and looked back at him "so I'm just going to come out and ask it. Did you steal Steve's car?"

Jonathan raised his eyebrows and turned away from her as her jaw dropped. "That did not sound as rude in my head," she said. He didn't look at her.

Finally he asked, "Why do you think I did it?"

"So you did take it?" she asked incredulously. She was ready to run to the phone.

"I didn't say that," he said coolly. "If you notice," he gestured over to his car, "I'm not exactly the type to be driving around cars that people like Steve Harrington own."

"Just to be clear," Nancy started, "I don't believe that you did take the car. But Steve says -"

"Right, so Steve says it, so it has to be true," Jonathan rolled his eyes.

"Let me finish!" she said earnestly. "He said he saw you at his party," Jonathan turned his bewildered face to hers, "and he suspected you. I just wanted to rule you off the suspect list. That's all."

He looked into her eyes and Nancy could tell he was questioning whether to believe her or not.

"I know you're not the type to go to parties," she simply said shrugging her shoulders. As she had hoped, this broke some of the tension and he gave her a crooked smile.

"Gee, that doesn't make me feel like a loser at all," he said looking up

at the sky. "But you know," he suddenly stopped talking and looked at her. He brought his forefinger to his lips. Nancy's confusion disappeared once she heard what he heard. She slowly got up and turned around to her front door. With one swift motion she pushed the door open. All four boys leapt back and started laughing. Mike and Dustin started making kissy faces and noises at them while Will and Lucas just laughed.

"Mike Wheeler I'm gonna kill you!" she screamed out of embarrassment and ran after her little brother and his friend. She stopped halfway down the hall when she heard Jonathan telling Will to get in the car. She turned back and saw Jonathan mouth "later" to her. She nodded and smiled as she watched the boy swing his younger brother over his shoulder and carry him to the car.

3. The Alibi

Nancy found Barb at their usual table in the cafeteria.

"How'd it go with Jonathan?"

"Didn't get far thanks to my brother and his friends," she said rolling her eyes.

"But you still think he didn't do it? Because after talking to Carol, he was there. That's two people that place him at the party where he wasn't invited."

"I'm going to try catching him after school, but I feel like we're chasing the wrong lead. What would be his motive?"

"He hates Steve? Steve hates him? Selling Steve's car might make him some money?"

Nancy knew that everything Barb listed were valid reasons and she knew that logically speaking, Jonathan should be their number one suspect.

"Call it instinct but I just don't see it," she said and Barb sighed.

"Your instincts have been right before," Barb finally said, "but don't be blinded by any sentimental feelings."

Nancy ignored what Barb was trying to imply and pretended to be completely engrossed in her lunch.

As soon as the final bell rang Nancy rushed over to where Jonathan's car was parked. She had arrived there before he did and decided to wait for him by leaning against the hood of his car. Instead of Jonathan, however, she was approached by Steve.

"Still questioning Byers I see," he said nodding in approval.

"A little, but I honestly don't think he did it Steve," she watched Steve's face go sour.

"There's no one else it could be, Nance, I just can't imagine who else would dare take that car."

"That's why you're paying me and Barb," Nancy said smiling and patted his shoulder, "to imagine who would take it for you." She spotted Jonathan walking towards them and grabbed her bag from the ground. "I might swing by your place with Barb later today to take a look around if that's okay?"

Steve shrugged and nodded. "Yea that's fine by me," he said. She gave him a reassuring arm squeeze and jogged towards Jonathan.

"Let's talk," she said and grabbed his arm leading him to the football field.

"What was that about, does Steve want my car now?" Jonathan asked glaring back towards where Steve was still standing.

"He just wanted an update on what we've found, which is nothing," she said. They walked up the bleachers and sat in the highest row. "You don't have anywhere to go today, do you?" she suddenly asked remembering how much of a rush he had been the day before.

"No, I usually pick up shifts here and there when they need someone, and that was just one of the few times it's right after school," he said looking out towards the field.

"Okay, so to finish our conversation from last night," she gestured towards Jonathan for him to continue what he was telling her before their siblings had interrupted.

He sighed and clasped his hands. "One of the guys I work with, he works at another place and sometimes his boss needs an extra guy. All the pay is under the table so I'm not really an employee."

Nancy knitted her brows together trying to decipher what this side job could be.

"That night he needed someone extra and so I helped him out as a pizza delivery boy."

Nancy was taken aback. "That's it? You were at Steve's?"

"- delivering a pizza," he finished nodding. "It's a family run shop, Santucci's? They don't require you to wear any uniform or anything so I was wearing normal clothes. "

Nancy took out her notebook and started writing. "Do you mind if I speak to the people that own the pizza shop?"

Jonathan scrunched his face in thought, "If you could leave out the stolen car part then yea. The extra money really helps me out."

Nancy nodded, "I'll just tell them that I'm a jealous girlfriend wondering if you're actually cheating on me."

Jonathan opened his mouth in mild surprise and quietly chuckled. "Well okay then," he finally said.

"So what time did you arrive and what did you see?" Nancy asked pretending that the atmosphere hadn't become awkward.

Jonathan explained to Nancy that he had arrived at Steve's house at around 10:30 and that already most of the people there seemed wasted. Steve opened the door, barely had looked at him and shoved the money in his hand before closing the door in his face. "I'm honestly surprised he even remembered I was there," Jonathan said.

"Can you describe the cars that were parked in the driveway?" Nancy asked. None of the cars that Jonathan described matched the black convertible that Steve's father owned. "Do you remember seeing any car that matches the description?" Nancy continued. Jonathan shook his head and added "I wasn't there long so I can't be too sure."

There was a whistle out on the field and Jonathan and Nancy both watched as the football team started their warm-ups before practice.

"What else do you remember?" Nancy asked.

Jonathan looked down at his shoes and closed his eyes trying to think. "Like I said, everyone seemed pretty drunk. Almost everyone was inside but I heard people out behind the house too. Oh and Carol and Tommy were making out next to the roses."

"You sure it was Carol and Tommy?"

"Well while I was walking away they must have come up for air and saw me since I heard their voices asking what a loser like me was doing there," Jonathan said nonchalantly.

"Yea, that sounds like Carol and Tommy H alright," Nancy said with disdain. She closed her purple notebook and placed it back in her backpack. She noticed the outline of a camera sitting in Jonathan's bag. "You take pictures, right?" she asked him pointing at his backpack. Jonathan looked down and opened his bag.

"Yea, sometimes whenever I get the chance," he said. He took out a few notebooks and a math textbook before pulling out the camera. He then placed the books back into the bag and put the camera strap around his neck. Nancy noticed a couple of pictures sticking out of the math textbook and grabbed them. One was of a picture of Will, laughing while he was mid-bite of a stack of pancakes. Behind him was their mother, Joyce, also smiling while leaning against the kitchen counter cutting coupons. The other picture was of a bird sitting on the branch of a tree about to take flight. "These are amazing," she said as Jonathan snatched the pictures back from her hand.

"Thanks," he said quickly as he shoved the pictures back into the bag. Nancy suddenly had an idea.

"Are you doing anything later today? I know that you work most Friday nights."

"No," Jonathan said slowly, "I'm free."

"How would you like to come with me to Steve Harrington's house," she said with a smile that grew wider at his confused face.

4. Outsiders

Summary for the Chapter:

The crew decides to check out the scene of the crime to search for clues.

"What is *he* doing here," Steve asked slowly although it sounded more like a statement. He stared at Jonathan who was on Nancy's left.

Barb, who stood to her right, answered "apparently he's our photographer." Both Nancy and Jonathan looked at Barbara through the corner of their eyes. Barb was sporting a huge grin on her face as she stared back at the displeasure written all across Steve's face.

"And why do we need a photographer?" Steve asked with a sneer.

"Why not?" Barb answered again. Steve finally peeled his eyes from Jonathan and looked at Barb.

"Jonathan's pictures might help us find any details that we overlook today," Nancy finally explained. Steve sighed and stepped aside to let them in.

"The kitchen's this way," he said and gestured to the trio to follow him. Nancy walked next to Barb with Jonathan trailing behind.

"You're enjoying this a little too much," Nancy whispered to Barb.

"It's not every day you see Steve Harrington jealous," Barb replied and smiled back to Jonathan who was thankfully playing with his camera. Nancy rolled her eyes and ignored the fact that her face felt like it was burning.

"So," Steve said as they walked through the kitchen, "the keys go here." He pointed to a series of hooks that was attached to a hanging mail organizer. Two of the hooks were empty. "Feel free to take a pic—" he sarcastically said, but the other boy quickly took a picture before Steve could finish.

"Why don't you show us where everyone was hanging around during

the party?" Nancy said looking back and forth at the two boys. Steve's mouth, which was still in the position to finish the word "picture", finally closed. He raised an eyebrow at Jonathan, as if daring him to do something. Nancy could see Jonathan clenching his camera, but instead he glanced at Nancy and quickly dropped his eyes to the floor and relaxed his grip on his prized possession. "Barb, how about you guys retrace Jonathan's steps and take pictures while Steve goes through the events of the night with me?"

Barb and Jonathan nodded and headed back towards the front door. Nancy whipped around to face Steve after the two had shut the door. "What's your problem, Steve?" she asked, her head tilted to the side.

"My problem!? You're going to invite a guy I can't stand into my house and you're asking what's wrong with me?" Steve asked incredulously.

"Oh, what, so you hate him now? For what? What has he done to you?"

"Nothing! He just annoys me, I just - it doesn't matter now does it?" he said hands on his hips looking out the window instead of at her face.

Nancy took a step back, her face half in shock and half amused. "Don't tell me Barb was right?"

"Right about what?" he asked, his tone no longer angry but tired.

"That you're jealous of Jonathan?"

This brought the energy back into Steve's voice. "Jealous!? Me? Of him?" he halfheartedly laughed. "No, no, nope, no," he kept shaking his head.

"Oh my God, you are," she said again amusement replaced with confusion.

"The only way I am is if you two," he stopped and looked into Nancy's eyes which had widened. "This," he gestured his finger downward and motioned the shape of a circle, "was always you and Barbara. I was never invited to be a part of it and I never asked because I

figured it was your, I dunno, best friend thing. You broke up with me saying you felt like you didn't belong, that you felt out of place. But seeing him so easily fit into your little group just now, I can't help but wonder if I was the one who was out of place in your life Nancy."

Nancy just stood there, unable to say anything. Finally she said, "I'm not sure what you're seeing, but Jonathan is just-"

"Your little brother's friend's brother. Yea I remember you telling me that when I saw him-"

"Leaving my house with Will," she finished.

"Nancy," Steve said with sad eyes, "I didn't ask because I saw him leaving your house. I asked because I saw how comfortable you were talking to him."

Nancy parted her lips in disbelief. She remember that night when Steve asked what she was doing around Jonathan and she had simply answered with the truth. She couldn't even remember what their conversation had been about but she knew that it was probably about their brothers, or their moms, or some other small talk.

She furrowed her eyebrows and shook her head at Steve who sighed. "Look, I know I have no right to jealous. We're over and you can hang out with whoever you want but it's not so easy getting over you," he said with a small smile.

Nancy resisted the urge to grab his hand reassuringly. Instead she finally made eye contact with him and said "I'm so sorry if I ever hurt you Steve."

He shook his head. "Nah, don't worry about me Nance. We're not meant to be and that's fine. I'll be fine for the few days in my life I have before my father comes home and kills me."

Barb looked around the side of the house closes to the driveway while Jonathan started snapping pictures. Together they found several beer cans, cigarette buds and the smell of vomit.

"Ugh, he's doing a poor job of trying not to get busted," Barb said holding her nose.

"Or the maid he hired hasn't shown up yet," Jonathan said dryly.

Barb laughed, "It is so refreshing to hang out with someone who has the same disdain for Harrington as I do."

Jonathan smiled. "Unfortunately, Nancy seems to see the best in others I guess."

"Yeah she seems to do that a lot. And not just with Steve."

Jonathan could feel his neck getting red and went back to taking pictures instead of responding to the redhead. Before Barb could continue to say anything further, Nancy and Steve walked out.

"Oh God, it smells like death over here," Steve said pulling his sweater over his mouth and nose. He noticed Jonathan, Barbara and Nancy staring at him. "What?"

"Are you telling me you never even bothered to clean the house after the party?" Barb asked incredulously.

"I cleaned inside the house!" he argued. "I just didn't realize I should clean outside as well," he said softly. Barb shook her head and walked away. Steve looked at Jonathan. "It's okay Beyers. You can laugh at how much of an idiot I am."

Jonathan cracked a smile as Barb returned with a trash bag she had retrieved from the kitchen.

"Here," she said handing the bag to him, "we'll help out." Steve took the bag from Barb and stared at her in mild shock. "You really don't have to do that," he said but was interrupted halfway with Jonathan placing a couple of crushed cans in the bag. Steve turned to Jonathan his eyebrows raised. Jonathan shrugged. "I'll help too."

"Wait, don't clean up yet," Nancy said as she looked at one of the rose bushes. She carefully put her hand in the branches to avoid the thorns and pulled out a Freshen-Up chewing gum wrapper. She turned to see Jonathan and Barb looking confused but saw

recognition in Steve's face.

"Carol's favorite brand. Those assholes trashed my mom's flowers and didn't even bother to clean up!"

"And maybe," Nancy added, "they decided to add on to the property damage by having a joy ride as well?"

Notes for the Chapter:

My apologies for not updating faster. I started a new job and well I couldn't find much time to write as much. But thank you so much for your kind words!

5. Carol and Tommy

Summary for the Chapter:

Nancy and team decide to question two more suspects in the case of the missing car.

"Well isn't this a fun group to run into on this fine Saturday," Tommy sneered as he stared back at the group of four who had just walked into Benny's Burgers. Carol, who was sitting next to him, looked up from picking at fries on Tommy's plate and gave them a smirk.

"What happened to your dignity Steve?" she cracked.

Steve and Nancy both took a seat opposite of the couple while Jonathan grabbed two chairs from an empty table for himself and Barb.

"I don't know about you Steve," Tommy said, clearly annoyed at the presence of Jonathan and Barb, "but I'm not a fan of socially interacting with twerps that are beneath me." He nodded at Jonathan with a look of disgust.

"We're only here to ask about Steve's car. Answer the questions truthfully and you won't have to interact with us long," Nancy said sternly. She had never liked these two and their presence and influence on Steve was part of the reason she had broken up with him. It was also why she had asked Barbara to interview them initially. She glanced at Jonathan who didn't seem fazed by any of Tommy's words.

"Aww, trying to win back Steve's heart?" Carol said in a mocking baby voice. She then looked at Steve for reassurance but was met with a blank stare. "Maybe it's working."

Nancy looked at Steve who had not said a single word from the moment they had stepped foot into the diner.

"First question," Nancy said loudly, trying to drown out the pair's voices, "why did you steal the Harrington car?"

The couple looked at each other started to laugh.

"We can place you out of the house while the car was still there," Nancy said. Barb and Jonathan both looked at Nancy. Nancy didn't look at them but she felt their eyes questioning her. Sure she might be lying about the car still being at the house while Carol and Tommy were outside, but they didn't need to know that.

"And we can place the freak outside around the same time, isn't that right?" Tommy said looking at Jonathan with a smirk. "Come on man, tell them why you stole the car. Tell them that you needed the money." Jonathan stared at Tommy. He clenched his fists but stopped when he felt a small kick from under the table and looked at Nancy. She slightly shook her head and looked back at Tommy.

"Jonathan has an alibi that has already been confirmed. But you on the other hand," she drifted off as she pulled out the gum wrapper that was found in the garden earlier, "do not."

"Wowie look at that Carol, it's trash," Tommy said unimpressed.

"Anyone at the party could have had gum," Carol said as she sipped on her soda with a straw.

"Yea but not many people chew Freshen Up as much as you," Barb said as she flipped the gum wrapper over to reveal the brand name. "And from what I remember, this is the same gum that you started chewing when I interviewed you the other day."

"Fine, I might have tossed a wrapper, it doesn't mean we stole anything."

"But you do admit to trashing the Harrington garden then?" Nancy quickly asked.

The couple both glanced at Steve who had been looking at the bubbles in Carol's soda. He slowly raised his eyes at Nancy's question and waited for their answer.

Tommy shifted in his seat. "Steve we were drunk, okay? I mean you get it right? We do stupid stuff all the time when we get that bad."

Carol let out an exasperated laugh. "We did not steal your dad's car Steve," she said looking at the boy who still sat there silently. "Are you really going to let these losers treat your friends like this?"

"Were you guys always such assholes?" Steve asked suddenly. Tommy and Carol both sat back surprised.

"E-Excuse me?" Carol asked. "What you suddenly spend five minutes with these nerds and we're now assholes?"

Steve looked at Nancy who had her eyebrows knitted together in confusion and then past her to where Jonathan and Barb were sitting. Jonathan had a similar expression to Nancy's while Barb seemed to be amused. "These nerds acted more like friends for one day than you have all week," Steve said quietly. He looked back at Tommy and Carol. "What did you want to go on a joyride or something? Hmm? Did you accidentally crash it and that's why you're not saying anything? You wanna talk about friends, you aren't even helping me

figure this out. You guys didn't even offer to help out at the party, but instead you throw cans of beer and," he pointed to the small piece of paper still sitting on the middle of the table, "gum wrappers apparently all over the side of my house, you don't even tell me about it, don't even have the decency to clean it up yourselves and you're still supposed to be my friends?"

It was only seconds, but Nancy felt the silence after Steve's outburst lasted years. She quickly looked around to see if the entire diner had stopped talking but everyone else was engrossed in their own conversations.

Tommy took a napkin and wiped his face.

"Get the stick out of your ass Steve. We didn't take your dad's dumb car."

He then threw a couple of dollars and change on the tabletop and left with Carol following suit.

Barb let out a sigh and adjusted her glasses. "The answer is yes."

Steve, Nancy and Jonathan looked at her. "You think they stole the car?" Jonathan asked.

She shook her head and looked sympathetically at Steve. "Yes, they have always been assholes."

Steve put his head in his hands and groaned. "They did it, my own best friends have sentenced me to my death."

Jonathan rolled his eyes while Barb quietly chuckled. "I think that's a bit dramatic and I don't think you should call them best friends anymore," she said to Steve.

Nancy shot a look at Barb and turned to Steve. "I don't think they did it, Steve."

Steve lifted his head and turned to Nancy in bewilderment.

Jonathan nodded in agreement with Nancy. "They were too calm," he said, "with the exception of Tommy's passionate hate for me."

"They admitted to trashing the garden, but they didn't seem to react at all when I told them that the car was still there," she added.

"So what are you saying, we're nowhere near finding out what happened?" Steve asked. He looked at the ceiling and started to shake his head.

"Steve why don't you go home? I'll go through everything again. We'll find the car. I know we will," Nancy said softly. Steve looked at her and then at Barb who also nodded and slowly stood up. The remaining three watched a defeated Steve walk out of the diner.

"That, my friends, is what some might call a dead man walking," Barb

said. She looked at her watch and stood up as well. "I have to get home but I'll call you later," she said to Nancy and waved goodbye to Jonathan.

"Do you need to go home soon?" Nancy asked Jonathan. He shook his head. "Let's head to school then and get those pictures developed."

6. The Smoking Lens

Summary for the Chapter:

The investigation comes to a close as the case of the missing car is finally closed.

Jonathan slowly opened the door to the dark room and looked inside. "All clear."

Nancy walked in behind him and looked around. He turned on the red light, shut the door and then removed the film from his camera.

"It got pretty tense back there," Nancy said plainly. She wasn't sure what point she was trying to make but felt she needed to say something. They had driven in silence to the school, both consumed in their own thoughts.

"Yeah," Jonathan sighed.

"I'm sorry that Tommy and Carol said those things about you."

Jonathan shrugged. "It's nothing I haven't heard before." The amount of times Tommy had called him a freak and publicly humiliated him in school was so much that he had become numb to it. Nancy looked at him and then looked down. "I'm sorry that I never said anything before when he did say those things. It's one of the reasons I broke up with Steve. I didn't like who I was becoming with him and his friends."

She looked back up at him and saw him staring at her with a puzzled expression. "You were always nice to me though. Even in front of them. And I appreciated that," he whispered with a soft smile. Nancy blushed and was grateful that the red light probably hid her red face. Jonathan cleared his throat and started to develop the film. "Plus, it seems like Steve is starting to come to the same realization that you had. You two always did make a good couple and I can see you still care about each other," he said in a measured tone.

"I think I'll always care about him. He was my first boyfriend, but I

don't think we'll ever get back together. There's too many insecurities there," she said quietly as she watched Jonathan work. They both sat in their thoughts in silence once more before Nancy spoke again. "You know, he was always jealous of how I acted around you compared to him and his friends. I would wave it off saying that I was talking to you since our brothers were friends and that's it. But deep down I knew he was right."

Jonathan turned around and looked at her. Nancy started to become very aware how small the room was as she continued to talk, not able to stop.

"Being around you feels natural unlike being around anyone in Steve's world." Part of Nancy's brain was now focusing on how fast her heart was beating and she was sure that Jonathan could hear it in the silence.

Nancy could feel her face flush again and thought she could see Jonathan blushing as well, despite the red light bathing down on them.

Quickly changing the subject she looked at the pictures slowly starting to form and said, "Thanks for helping me on this. I mean it. I know you didn't have to but," she stepped closer to him, "I'm glad you're here."

She went on her tip toes and kissed his cheek. "Come on, let's go see if we can find anything in the cafeteria while this stuff dries." Nancy turned around to leave, mostly because she couldn't deal with the tension that had built up, but quickly turned back around and gasped.

"What?" Jonathan said suddenly very self conscious. His heart was pounding from Nancy's peck on the cheek and he wasn't sure if he should make a move or let the moment go.

Nancy pointed at one of the frames Jonathan had hung up. "I know what happened to the car!"

Steve was slumped back on his sofa staring at the ceiling when he

heard a car pull up to his driveway. He got up and from the window could see Jonathan, Nancy and Barb spilling out from Jonathan's car. He quickly stood up and went to open the door. "We solved it!" Nancy said beaming as Barb and Jonathan both tried to hide their amusement.

"You - you solved it," Steve said slowly and looked at the three individuals before him. "Are you messing with me?" he asked trying to contain his excitement. Nancy shook her head. Steve put both his hands on his head and then started jumping up and down. "I'm not gonna get murdered! Where is it!?"

"Whoa, whoa, hold up," Barb said before Nancy could answer. "First we need our payment and can we at least be invited inside?"

They made their way into Steve's kitchen as Steve talked. "I can't believe you guys did it! I never doubted you, you know," he rambled as he grabbed his wallet from the counter. Barb rolled her eyes and looked over at Jonathan who snickered. Steve took three twenty dollar bills and gave one to each of them. "Oh," Jonathan said, suddenly feeling bad that he had laughed.

"You helped with the investigation you deserve it," Steve said eagerly and gestured at the group to sit at the kitchen table. "Well?" Steve asked hopefully looking at all of them.

Nancy smiled at Steve and took out the photo Jonathan had took of Steve at the start of the investigation, mid-sneer and his eyes half closed. Steve's face fell. It was probably the most unflattering picture of himself he had ever seen.

"I want my money back."

Nancy shook her head and then pointed at the picture. Steve looked back down to the mail organizer that was behind Steve in the picture. Steve's jaw dropped and quickly snapped his neck around and got up to grab the invoice that was sitting in one of the slots. The Hawkins Auto Shop logo was printed on top of the invoice clear as day, especially noticeable in a photo negative. Nancy took the invoice out of Steve's hands and glanced down at it. "Just as I thought," she nodded, "your dad took the car in to the auto shop for some work and

took the other car for vacation. You never noticed most likely because your head was full of thoughts on the party."

Steve sat back down shell-shocked and said to no one in particular, "I am a dumbass."

"Identifying the problem is the first step in moving forward from what I hear," Barb quipped.

"Don't feel so bad Steve, all of us were here and we all missed it," Nancy said helpfully.

"I took a picture of it and I didn't see it," Jonathan shrugged.

Steve looked at the others and chuckled. "All right, so we're all dumbasses."

"Guess so," Nancy grinned.

Steve put both his hands on his face and groaned. "What a waste of time!"

"Oh I don't know about that," Nancy said stealing a glance at Jonathan, "I think it was definitely eye opening."

"At least we had fun," Barb said looking at the boy she previously held in contempt. Steve dropped his hands and looked at Barb.

"Yeah. I guess I see why you two do this stuff now," Steve said thoughtfully. He then sat up as if snapping back to reality. "So, uh, I was gonna order a pizza, you guys want in?" Steve asked eyeing the other three. Jonathan, Nancy and Barb looked at each other, a little surprised and all nodded.

"Sure," Barb said smiling.

"Yeah," Jonathan said still clearly surprised.

"As long as it's pepperoni," Nancy said. Steve nodded and got up. She grinned at Barb who was holding her twenty to the light as if to make sure it wasn't counterfeit and then looked over at Jonathan. He was gazing back at her with a warm smile and she smiled back not caring

anymore if he saw her face flush.

Steve grabbed the phone relieved and strangely content at the company he was in.

"All right, one large pepperoni for the party coming up."

Author's Note:

Comments and suggestions are welcome!